

THE ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS

BREAK THE CHAINS

The Anarchist Black Cross (A.B.C.) is an international network of autonomous groups who support anarchist, class war, and other prisoners. As resistance movements grow, so do the state's attempts to crush them. Many of the people who have dedicated their lives to struggle have been locked up in prisons. The state is trying to neutralize these strong and dedicated fighters. We will not allow them to be silenced.

The Anarchist Red Cross was started in Tsarist Russia to organize aid for political prisoners and to organize self-defense against the Cossack Army. During the Russian civil war, they changed the name to the Black Cross to avoid confusion with the Red Cross who was organizing relief in the country. After the Bolsheviks seized power the Black Cross moved to Berlin and continued to aid prisoners of the new regime, as well as victims of Italian fascism and others. The Black Cross fell apart during the depression due to the incredible demand for its services and a decline in financial aid. In the late 1960's the organization resurfaced in Britain, where it first worked to aid prisoners of the Spanish resistance which had not, in fact, died after the civil war. Now it has expanded and works in many different areas around the world.

NIGHTCRAWLERS ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS

Nightcrawlers A.B.C. was formed in May of 1993. We support anarchist and other political prisoners, focusing our efforts here in the New York/New Jersey area. We do our main support work for New Afrikan Anarchist Prisoner of War, Ojore N. Lutalo, but are also in communication with other prisoners. We have worked in coalition with other groups around issues in Trenton State Prison in New Jersey, focusing on the trial of the Trenton 7, seven prisoners who were put on trial for their alleged leadership roles in the assault and attempted murder of prison officials. We are a member of the Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition. We hope to help the A.B.C. network grow here in the U.S. by helping others to start their own prisoner support groups and by helping to build communication between existing groups.



We support prisoners in many ways. We provide material aid to prisoners (with letters, visits, food, books, etc.) and we aid their cases by letters and petitions to officials. We organize demonstrations and distribute information about their imprisonment. We help them to participate in the movement by keeping them informed, and relaying their thoughts and written documents to the outside.

WHY ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS?

It is crucial to get information out to the larger community about political prisoners, as well as exposing the systematic repression and the classist, racist nature of the criminal justice system. In the words of Ojore N. Lutalo, "Any movement that does not support it's political internees is a sham movement!" We cannot allow the state to divide our movement by losing contact with our comrades inside. They are very much a part of the movement, a lot can be gained from their knowledge, and we must support them.

PRISONS IN THE US

Before we get into the statistical data about prison policies, incarceration rates, and the like, lets examine the concept of prisons. Does it make sense to dehumanize people, lock them in cages, change them into numbers and remove them from their families and communities, to make them "behave better" in society? Aside from being inhumane, prisons do not deal with why people commit crimes. Prisons are violent institutions which only make more violence and cannot deter "crime" or protect us from it. If prisons do not rehabilitate, do not protect, and do not serve as a deterrent, what is their use?

PRISONS AND CAPITALISM

While the benefits of prisons to society is negligible, the economic interests to the private and state sectors are immense. Over \$80 billion is spent on prisons every year. From architects to academics, from food service vendors to corrections bureaucrats, there is a lot of money to be made from the proliferation of prisons.

The other aspect of profit from prisons is that of prisoners' labor. The private sector and the state are increasingly taking advantage of the fact that prisoners enjoy none of the rights free workers have. They cannot unionize. They are not covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act. They do not voice grievances, except at the risk of incurring the arbitrary discipline of prison authorities. They can be hired and fired at will, and do not have to be paid minimum wage. Of course, businesses can receive tax breaks for hiring prisoners.

WHO GOES TO PRISON?

The seriousness of a crime does not predict who goes to prison and who doesn't. Society's losses from white collar crime far exceeds the economic impact of burglaries, robberies, larcenies, and auto thefts combined. Over twice as many low income defendants receive prison sentences, compared to high income defendants.

Most people behind bars have committed economic crimes, which is often related to survival. For example, the number of women in prison is rapidly increasing. Many of these women are single mothers and 60% of them are Black and Latina. Usually they are

imprisoned for economically related crimes such as shoplifting and prostitution.

Nearly half of all people in prison are unemployed at the time of their arrest. The official unemployment rate for Blacks is somewhere between 15 and 20 percent, which is double that of whites; one study shows that at any given time 47 percent of Black men are without jobs. Median income for Black families is 56 percent that of white families.

Now we move into the specific role that race plays once people are brought to the justice system. Nationwide, the rate of imprisonment for blacks is over 7 times that of whites. The U.S. has the world's highest rate of incarceration with 426 prisoners per 100,000 people. South Africa is the second highest rate with 333 prisoners per 100,000. Black males in the U.S. are incarcerated at a rate of four times that of Black males in South Africa, 3,109 per 100,000, compared to 729 per 100,000.

Another element of the role of race is the difference in lengths of prison terms for Blacks and whites. In the federal system, sentences for Blacks are 20% longer than whites committing similar crimes. If time served by Blacks were reduced to parity with whites, the federal system would require 3000 fewer prison cells-enough to empty 6 of the newest 500-bed prisons.

TOOLS OF REPRESSION

There are over 150 political prisoners and prisoners of war in the US. None of them are recognized by the government and only three are recognized by Amnesty International. They have received very little support in this country while the prison system has been developing methods and technologies to torture and repress them. We cannot allow this to continue.



CONTROL UNITS

Political prisoners, as well as jailhouse lawyers, people who have filed lawsuits against prisons, and many others who are arbitrarily chosen for whatever reason, are placed in "control units". The first control unit, Marion Prison in Illinois, was built 20 years ago, as a part of a wave of repression carried out by the government against the upsurge of revolutionary and progressive movements in that period. Marion has been a state of permanent "lock-down" since 1983. Prisoners are locked-down in their cells 23 hours a day, and all standard vocational, educational and recreational activities are nonexistent. Prisoners are forced to sleep, eat, and defecate in their cells, which are 8'x 10'. They are forbidden to socialize with each other or to participate in group religious services. Those who "misbehave" may be tied spread-eagle and naked on their concrete slab beds. According to a past warden of Marion, "The purpose of the Marion control unit is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and society at large." Control unit prisons are proliferating. Not only have already existing prisons been Marionized, in federal, state and even county detention centers, but there are plans to build larger, higher security, more technologically advanced torture chambers such as the one currently being built in Florence, Colorado. (See factsheet on Florence for more details.)

CONCLUSION

Combining statistics with common sense will show that prisons are inhumane institutions that are composed of victims of poverty and racism, and that their most useful function is to torture and repress anyone who challenges the status quo.

Many people who have struggled to change our society have been locked up for their beliefs and actions. The state tries to silence them by isolating and torturing them. There are many things we can do to challenge the system, and support those on the inside. Start supporting a prisoner. Get involved with one of the many groups involved in prisoner support work, or start your own.

The research was gathered from: Ward Churchill, *Cages of Steel*, Maitsonneuve Press, 1992. Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, *The proposed Prison in Florence, Colorado, A "New and Improved" Marion*, Phone: (312) 235- 0070. Alexander C. Lichtenstein *The Fortress Economy: The Economic role of the U.S. Prison System*, Available through the American Friends Service Committee, Bruce White, *Black Robes White Justice*, Carol Publishing Group, 1990.

For more info and/or a list of groups in your area contact us at:

Nightcrawlers ABC
PO Box 20181
Tompkins Sq Sta
New York, NY 10009

